Is it time to panic?; Environment is deadly, worsening mess, but not hopeless, says new UN report

Kingston Whig-Standard

March 14, 2019 Thursday

Final Edition

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Section: NEWS; Pg. D2

Length: 465 words

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Dateline: WASHINGTON

Body

Earth is sick with multiple and worsening environmental ills killing millions of people yearly, a new UN report says.

Climate change, a global major extinction of animals and plants, a human population soaring toward 10 billion, degraded land, polluted air, and plastics, pesticides and hormone-changing chemicals in the water are making the planet an increasing unhealthy place for people, says the scientific report issued once every few years.

But it may not be too late. "There is every reason to be hopeful," report co-editors Joyeeta Gupta and Paul Ekins told The Associated Press in an email. "There is still time but the window is closing fast."

The sixth Global Environment Outlook, released Wednesday at a UN conference in Nairobi, Kenya, painted a dire picture of a planet where environmental problems interact with each other to make things even more dangerous for people. It uses the word "risk" 561 times in a 740-page report.

The report concludes "unsustainable human activities globally have degraded the Earth's ecosystems, endangering the ecological foundations of society."

But the same document says changes in the way the world eats, buys things, gets its energy and handles its waste could help fix the problems.

The report is "a dramatic warning and a high-level road map for what must be done to prevent widespread disruption and even irreversible destruction of planetary life-support systems," said University of Michigan environment dean Jonathan Overpeck, who wasn't part of the report.

Several other scientists also praised the report, which draws on existing science, data and maps.

"This report clearly shows the connections between the environment and human health and wellbeing," said Stuart Pimm, a Duke University ecologist.

Gupta and Ekins, environmental scientists in Amsterdam and London, said air pollution annually kills 7 million people worldwide and costs society about $5 trillion. Water pollution, with associated diseases, kills another 1.4 million.

The scientists said the most important and pressing problems facing humankind are global warming and loss of biodiversity because they are permanent and affect so many people in so many different ways. CLIMATE CHANGE "Time is running out to prevent the irreversible and dangerous impacts of climate change," the report says, noting that unless something changes, global temperatures will exceed the threshold of warming - another 1 degree Celsius above current temperatures - that international agreements call dangerous.

The report details climate change impacts on human health, air, water, land and biodiversity. Almost all coastal cities and small island nations are increasingly vulnerable to flooding from rising seas and extreme weather. !@COPYRIGHT=© 2019 Osprey Media Group Inc. All rights reserved.

Load-Date: March 14, 2019